Fair Price Shops(FPS) throughout the country, there is a possibility of such instances occurrings. Under the Targetted Public Distribution System(EPDS), the supervision and monitoring the functioning of FPSs rests with the concerned Stgte Governments/UTs. In order to strengthen the hands of the State Governments, the Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001 has been issued on 31st August, 2001 under section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 with a view to curb willful adulteration, substitution, diversion etc. of the PDS commodities. An offence committee in violation of the provisions of the Order shall invoke criminal liability under the Act.

Decreasing number of vultures

†218. SHRIMATIKUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the number of vultures in the country has been decreasing continuously;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) what steps are being taken to save this species?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA):(a)Asurvey conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society under a special project sponsored in the year 2000 by the Ministry of Environment & Forests revealed that there has been more than 90 per cent decline in the populations of three species of vultures *viz,* White Backed, Long Billed and Slender Billed in many parts of the country.

(b) Post mortem and diagnostic tests have revealed that this drastic decline was due to consumption of the veterinary drug diclofenac by the vultures who fed on carcasses of livestock. Diclofenac causes deposition of uric acid in the visceral organs leading to sudden death.

(c) The steps taken by the Government of India to save vultures are as follows—

(i) Protection status of White backed, Long Billed and Slender Billed Vultures has been upgraded from schedule IV to Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(ii) Two workshops were organized in New Delhi in September 2000 and April, 2004 to work out a comprehensive strategy **for** conservation of vultures in consultation with scientists.

(iii) The State Governments have been advised to draw a comprehensive action plan for effective conservation of vultures.

(iv) Bombay Natural History Soceity in collaboration with the Haryana State Forest Department has taken up a project on conservation of vultures. A Vulture Captive Care facility' has been established at Panchkula.

(v) The Ministry of Health has been requested to replace the use of the drug diclofenac with suitable alternative drugs.

Depletion of forest cover

219. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is considerable depletion of forest cover in the country over the last few years;

(b) if so, the reasons for the same and effects thereof; and

(c) what measures are contemplated to increase the green cover and check environmental degradation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA):(a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The Measures undertaken by the Government are:—

(i) Legal measures like Indian Forest Act, 1927, Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and Environmental Protection Act, 1986 and the rules, guidelines thereof.

(ii) Management measures like working of forests accroding to approved Working Plans etc.

(iii) Financial measures like providing assistance to the States/Union Territories under Centrally Sponsored Schemes and externally